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ABSTRACT

The option of verb-final versus verb-second (V2) order in subordinate clauses in German is subject to regularity when discourse context is taken into account. The artificial rule which places the verb at the end of any subordinate clause obliterates the feel for discourse structure that is still present in colloquial German. The option of using V2 order in a number of syntactic environments is conditioned by at least three discourse-pragmatic factors: lack of discourse-presuppositional material, topic switch, and speaker empathy. The fact that the three features combine to effect a particular syntactic device (V2) leads to the conclusion that the syntactic device has an additional, discourse-pragmatic function, and that the three features involved might be in some way closely related. The most striking common element among them is one of "speaker assertion." This means not only that parataxis and hypotaxis are probably assertionally related concepts, but also that "assertion" can probably be made not only at a logical-semantic level, but also at a discourse and even an emotional level. (Author/JB)

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CONTEXT AND SYNTAX: The Effect of Discourse Pragmatics on Clause-Structure in German

Ronald W. Dunbar

I. Introduction. It is a well-known fact of German grammar that main clauses exhibit verb-second word order, while subordinate clauses exhibit verb-final order. What has, however, remained inexplicable is the fact that some subordinate clauses (both relative and conjunct subordinate clause-types) have the option of exhibiting main-clause, verb-second order. At times this option seems to be part of the so-called "standard" language, and at times the option is relegated to use in "colloquial" German.

An examination of the situation in both the standard and colloquial varieties of German shows that the use of V-2 order seems optional in at least the following cases:

(1) The choice between paratactic denn ("because") and hypotactic weil ("because") (Standard and Colloquial German):

(a) Er ist weggelaufen, denn er hatte Angst. (V-2)
"he ran away , because he was afraid"

(b) Er ist weggelaufen, weil er Angst hatte. (V-F)
"he ran away , because he afraid was"

(2) The use of verb-second or verb-final order with relative clauses (Colloquial German):

(a) Ich begegnete jemand, der hatte $5000 in der Tasche. (V-2)
" I met someone who had $5000 in his pocket"

(b) Ich begegnete jemand, der $5000 in der Tasche hatte. (V-F)
" I met someone who $5000 in his pocket had "

(3) The use of exbraciation (placement beyond the verb) of afterthought material in subordinate clauses; = non-verb-final order (Colloquial German):

(a) Ich tue es nicht, und wenn du birst vor Zorn! (non-V-F)
"I will do it not, even if you explode from anger"

(b) Ich tue es nicht, und wenn du vor Zorn birst! (V-F)
"I will do it not, even if you from anger explode"

(4) The use of verb-second or verb-final order in VP-complements (Standard or Colloquial German):

(a) Ich glaube, er hat die Karten vergessen. (V-2)
" I think he has the cards forgotten"

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(b) Ich glaube, dass er die Karten vergessen hat. (V-F)
"I think that he the cards forgotten has"

What I wish to illustrate is that there is a regularity to this option in word order choice--that it is not simply a matter of whim or sloppiness--and that this regularity is determined by discourse-pragmatic factors. Since there is a regularity involved, and since verb-second and verb-final orders are otherwise used as markers for parataxis and hypotaxis respectively, then this optionality in word orders must also crucially involve our innate concepts of parataxis and hypotaxis.

II. Denn/weil: The choice between parataxis and hypotaxis in adverbial subordinate clauses.

2.1. Proof for the notion that discourse context is crucial to the choice of syntactic variants in German is not difficult to provide. An examination of sentences (1a) and (1b) above in isolation would suggest that the use of denn with paratactic, V-2 order and weil with hypotactic, V-F order is largely a matter of personal preference. As a matter of fact, the treatment of the distribution of denn and weil in the past has largely been confined to stating simply that one demands parataxis, the other hypotaxis. On the other hand, if discourse context is taken into consideration, there is often no choice at all, and the "optionality" disappears. Note for example the following two conversations:

(5) (Speaker 1) Was ist geschehen?
"what happened ?"

(Speaker 2)
- Er ist weggelaufen, denn er hatte Angst. (V-2)
"he ran away because he was afraid"
- Er ist weggelaufen, weil er Angst hatte. (V-F)
"he ran away because he afraid was"

(6) (Speaker 1) Warum ist er weggelaufen?
"why ran he away ?"

(Speaker 2) Er hatte Angst.
"he was afraid"

(Speaker 3)
- *Nein--er ist nicht weggelaufen, denn er hatte Angst.
Er ist weggelaufen, denn... (V-2)
"no--he didn't run away because he was afraid. He ran away because..."
- Nein--er ist nicht weggelaufen, weil er Angst hatte.
Er ist weggelaufen, weil... (V-F)
"no--he didn't run away because he afraid was. He ran away because..."

It becomes apparent here that there are environments which allow hypotactic weil (with V-F order) but disallow the use of paratactic denn and V-2. The difference between examples (5) and (6) above is that in (5) the subordinate clause contains new, asserted information. In (6), on the other hand, the subordinate clause contains old, discourse-presuppositional information, and, correspondingly, the use of denn and V-2 is not permitted.[1]

We should not be surprised to find that the use of V-2 is constrained in the presence of old, presupposed information. A similar constraint could be illustrated for the use of adverb preposing in German:

(7) (Speaker 1) Aus dem Fenster stürzte der arme Karl.
"out the window jumped poor Karl"

(Speaker 2) Warum?
"why?"

(Speaker 1) {*Aus dem Fenster stürzte er, weil...
"out the window jumped he because"
Er stürzte aus dem Fenster, weil...
"he jumped out the window because"} [2]

2.2. Left-dislocation, a known topic-setting and topic-switching device (cf. Gundel 1977) also appears to have restrictions which involve parataxis and hypotaxis. As a matter of fact, it can be shown that the use of left-dislocation and shift of topic is facilitated by the use of denn, hindered by the use of weil, and impossible with V-F word order:

(8) Q Wie geht's dem Heinz?
"how goes it with Heinz?(i.e., 'how's Heinz?')"

A {Geschäftlich geht's ihm gut. Übrigens, er sieht auch gesund aus, denn die Anna, die kocht recht gut. (denn, V-2)
"businesswise it's going well. By the way, he looks healthy, too , because Anna, she cooks pretty well"
?...Übrigens, er sieht auch gesund aus, weil die Anna, die kocht recht gut. (weil, V-2)
*...Übrigens, er sieht auch gesund aus, weil die Anna, die recht gut kocht. (weil, V-F)
"...because Anna, she pretty well cooks"}

An interesting bit of support for the argument that topic-switch acts to condition the denn/weil choice comes from the fact that denn cannot be

preceded by old, presupposed information, while weil can be:

(9) Warum verhält er sich immer so komisch?
"why behaves he always so funny?"

*Er tut's nur, denn er ist so schrecklich einsam. (V-2)
"he does it only because he is so terribly lonely"

Er tut's nur, weil er so schrecklich einsam ist. (V-F)
"he does it only because he so terribly lonely is"

In other words, the distinction between weil and denn appears to parallel the use of "restrictive" and "non-restrictive" because as outlined in Rutherford 1970. Namely, when the because-clause is non-restrictive and cannot be subsumed under one NP, then the choice in German is denn and V-2 order. Note for example in (10b) and (11b) below the impossibility of subsuming the non-restrictive clause under one NP with the clause that preceded it. In short, the topics have switched:

(10a) Restr. Carl hates math because he can't stand his teacher.
What were we talking about?
[$_{NP}$ his hating math because he can't stand his teacher$_{NP}$]

(10b) Non-R. Carl hates math, because he told me so. [3]
What were we talking about?
*[$_{NP}$ his hating math, because he told me so$_{NP}$]

(11a) Restr. Karl mag Mathe nicht, weil er seinen Lehrer nicht leiden kann. "because he his teacher not stand can"
Worüber sprachen wir?
"about what were we talking?"
[$_{NP}$ dass Karl Mathe nicht mag, weil er seinen Lehrer nicht leiden kann. $_{NP}$] "because he his teacher not stand can"

(11b) Non-R. Karl mag Mathe nicht, denn er hat's mir gesagt.
"Carl likes math not , because he told me (so)"
Worüber sprachen wir?
"about what were we talking?"
*[$_{NP}$"dass Karl Mathe nicht mag, denn er hat's mir gesagt$_{NP}$"] [4]

2.3. The difference between denn and weil and their distributions has occasionally been considered as being conditioned by juncture and pause.[5] Namely, at least in isolation, a paratactic denn is allowed after a full stop, whereas hypotactic weil seems curiously out-of-place in that environment:

(12a) Er geht pleite. Denn er hat auf die falschen Leute gehört.
"he's going bankrupt. Because he has to the wrong people listened"

(12b) ?Er geht pleite. Weil er auf die falschen Leute gehört hat.
"because he to the wrong people listened has"

One could suggest that perhaps the choice of denn/weil here is a function of sentence intonation. Notice that following sentence intonation contour A (↗), we must choose weil. After intonation contour B (↘), we must choose denn:

(13a) A Er ist pleite gegangen↗, weil...
"he has bankrupt gone, because"

(13b) A ?Er ist pleite gegangen↗, denn...

(14a) B *Er ist pleite↘ gegangen. Weil...
"he has bankrupt gone. Because"

(14b) B Er ist pleite↘ gegangen. Denn...

But rather than simply claim that the choice of denn and weil is manifested by the particular sentence intonation pattern which precedes it, it would be much neater, in light of what has been discussed thus far, to be able to show that both denn/weil and their respective intonation contours are conditioned by factors of topic-switch, and indeed we can.

Delattre, Poenack and Olsen (1965) have already shown that the intonation pattern A (↗) in German speech is indicative of continuation (i.e., the thought has not yet been completed, something is to continue). Contour B (↘), on the other hand, marks finality (i.e., the thought has been completely expressed, no continuation is expressly expected). In other words, we must assume, if an intonation contour marks "finality," that it is acting as a discourse "sign post" to indicate that we may also start on a new topic of discourse at this juncture if we so desire. Instead of viewing contour A as a conditioning factor for weil, it might be best to consider

both contour A and weil (as well as V-F order in general, as we shall see shortly) to be marked phonologically and gramatically , indicating that what follows is in fact a continuation of discourse topic as it has occurred thus far.

2.4. The case for denn and weil might be considered as evidence for only one lexical variant rather than for the choice between V-2 and V-F order, were it not for the fact that trotzdem/obwohl ("even though/ although") and the two readings for als ("when") are subject to the same contextual restraints. In the standard language, trotzdem and obwohl both require subordinating, V-F word order. In Colloquial German, however, it is quite possible to use the "non-restrictive" obwohl with topic-switch and V-2 order, but quite impossible to use them with the "restrictive" conjunction trotzdem:

(15a) Sie war sehr nett zu ihm, obwohl die Trudi, die tut das wohl für jedermann. "she was very nice to him, although Trudi, she does that probably for anyone" (V-2)

(15b) *Sie war sehr nett zu ihm, trotzdem der Otto, der sie beleidigt hat. "even though Otto, he her insulted" (V-F)

A similar case can be constructed for als-clauses, as well as for restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses (see Dunbar 1979: 73-74; 89).

III. The Choice between Parataxis and Hypotaxis in VP-Complements.

3.1. In Standard German, one may interchange V-2 and V-F clauses in a number of complement sentences. Note for example sentences (4a) and (4b) from above as an illustration:

(4a) Ich glaube, er hat die Karten vergessen. (V-2)

(4b) Ich glaube, dass er die Karten vergessen hat. (V-F)

There are, however, environments where the presence of old information makes the use of V-2 constructions unacceptable. The sentence

(16a) Ich bedaure, dass ich dein Buch verlegt habe.
"I regret , that I your book misplaced have"

(with V-F order) is most likely to be uttered in a situation where both speaker and listener are aware that the book is lost. But in the sentence

(16b) Ich bedaure, ich habe dein Buch verlegt [6]
" I regret I have your book lost"

with V-2 order in both clauses, it is very difficult to get a reading where the loss of the book is presupposed as common knowledge.

3.2. This sort of observation also helps to account for something which even Berthold Delbrück noted in his classic Germanic Syntax (1919) but was unable to explain. Delbrück noted that it is possible in German to say either

(17a) Ich denke, es wird so werden
" I think it will so be " (V-2)

or

(17b) Ich denke, dass es so werden wird
" I think that it so be will" (V-F)

However, the option in word order varieties is not allowed if the main clause is negated:

(18a) *Ich denke nicht, es wird so werden
"I think not it will so be" (V-2)

(18b) Ich denke nicht, dass es so werden wird
"I think not that it so be will" (V-F)

However, it is quite clear that negated predicates generally involve presupposition.[7] Thus, when the clause is embedded under a positive main clause, then it can contain new, asserted information and can be expressed with V-2 order. When the main clause is negated, as in examples (18a) and (18b) above, then the subordinate clause can only contain information which is presupposed as common knowledge (perhaps discussed explicitly), and the clause cannot exhibit V-2 order. Rather than explain this distribution as a quirk of negated clauses, it is far more economical to subsume it under the general constraint on V-2 order and parataxis in presuppositional environments.

3.3. There is one last phenomenon involving word order in VP-comple-

ments which is also apparently explainable by recourse to discourse pragmatics, but which has little or nothing to do with either discourse presupposition or switch of discourse topic. Rather,the distinction appears to have something to do with another assertion-related factor--the speaker's willingness, emotionally, to stand behind a statement.

For example, the grammatical person of the main clause subject in sentences in (19a) and (19b) below seems to have an effect on the tolerance of V-2 and V-F orders. Sentence (19a), with first-person main clause subject, is curiously judged more felicitous by many native speakers than is (19b) with third-person subject:

(19a) Ich glaube, das Kind ist zu Hause.
" I think the child is at home" (V-2)

(19b) ?Er glaubt, das Kind ist zu Hause.
"he thinks the child is at home" (V-2)

Sentences such as (19b) seem to improve slightly when embedded with dass ("that"), using V-F instead of V-2 order:

(19c) Er glaubt, dass das Kind zu Hause ist.
"he thinks that the child at home is" (V-F)

Similarly, sentence (20a) seems more tolerant of V-2 than does (20b):

(20a) Ich schätze, das sind 45 Stück.
"my guess is, there are 45 of those things" (V-2)

(20b) ?Er schätzt, das sind 45 Stück.
"his guess is, there are 45 of those things" (V-2)

Green (1976: 386) has noticed that, in English, certain emphatic syntactic phenomena confined normally only to main clauses (such as adverb preposing) can only be embedded if the speaker supports the proposition affected. For example:

(21a) John says that never before have prices been so high, and I agree.

(21b) ?John says that never before have prices been so high, but he's wrong.

It may well be the case that the situation in German is similar to that of the constraint in English. Kuno (1976:433) has suggested that

the speaker empathizes most easily with himself (i.e., the first person); less so with the hearer (i.e., second person); and least with the third party (third person).

Thus, we should not find it particularly surprising that V-2 order and parataxis are more readily allowable under a main clause with second-person subject than under one with a third person subject:

(22a) Du weisst doch, das habe ich nie gesagt.
"you know certainly, that have I never said"

(22b) ?Er weiss doch, das habe ich nie gesagt.
"he knows certainly, that have I never said"

In effect, there is an extent to which the speaker's empathy with a statement or his willingness to accept it as his own has an effect on the tolerance of V-2 order.

IV. Summary. The option of V-F vs. V-2 order in subordinate clauses, which occurs commonly in Colloquial German and only with certain lexical items or constructions in Standard German, is in fact subject to regularity when discourse context is taken into account. The artificially-constructed rule of the standard language which places the verb at the end of any subordinate clause (actually borrowed from Latin from the middle of the 17th Century onward)[8] obviously obliterates the feel for discourse structure which is still present today in Colloquial German.

It has been shown that the option of using V-2 order in a number of different syntactic environments (e.g., various adverbial subordinate clauses, in particular denn/weil; certain VP-complements; non-restrictive relatives; and exbraciation) is in fact conditioned by at least three discourse-pragmatic factors: lack of discourse-presuppositional material; topic-switch; and speaker empathy. The fact that three different discourse-pragmatic features "conspire" to effect a particular syntactic device (V-2) leads to the conclusion that (a) the syntactic device has an additional, discourse-pragmatic function; and that (b) the three features involved might be in some way closely related. The most striking common denominator among them is one of "speaker assertion."

This not only means that parataxis and hypotaxis are probably assertionally-related concepts, but it also suggests that "assertion" can be made not only on a logical-semantic level, but also on a discourse and

even an emotional level.

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NOTES

[1]A similar case exists with exbraciation. Exbraciation in main and subordinate clauses is not uncommon in Colloquial German. For example:

Du weisst doch, dass er viel verloren hat | nach dem Krieg.
"you know certainly that he much lost | after the war"

But exbraciation is certainly blocked when the exbraciated element is old information:

Wie ist's Ihrem Mann gegangen | nach dem Krieg?
"how did things go for your husband | after the war?"

?Du weisst doch, dass er viel verloren hat | nach dem Krieg.
"you know certainly that he much lost | after the war"

[2]Hooper and Thompson (1973), in discussing the parallels between main clause phenomena and speaker assertion in English, illustrate a similar case for adverb preposing and other "root" transformations in English.

[3]See also Schachter 1973.

[4]It can be shown that restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses in Colloquial German are subject to this same distinction concerning the tolerance of V-2 order (see Dunbar 1979: 73-74).

[5]See for example Der grosse Duden, 5th edition, Vol. 2, p. 152.

[6]Hooper and Thompson (1973) list regret (= German bedauern) as being strictly presupposed (in a logical sense). However, as we can see here, in both German and English, these verbs can in certain contexts be used with new information. If they are, then V-2 order is permitted in German.

[7]Note for example that a sentence such as

I'm sorry, but I can't give you a lift home this evening.

only makes sense in the context where the listener is expecting a lift home. If he is not, he might well ask if the ride had already been somehow arranged. See also Givón 1979 as well as Ries 1880:21 in this respect.

[8]See Behaghel 1932: 17-18 and Lockwood 1968: 261-64.

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